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PESTICIDES:

Food watchdog pushes back on glyphosate health criticism

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The head of Europe's food safety watchdog has written to a group of 100 scientists, rejecting their criticism of the herbicide ingredient glyphosate.

The popular chemical has been the subject of scrutiny since the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer said last year that it is a likely a human carcinogen. The European Food Safety Authority then issued an opinion that glyphosate is unlikely to cause cancer.

Environmental groups have sought a ban on glyphosate to protect consumers.

In an open letter to European Health and Food Safety Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis last year, nearly 100 scientists, led by Christopher Portier of the Environmental Defense Fund, urged the European Commission to disregard the EFSA opinion.

Replying to the letter today, EFSA Executive Director Bernhard Url said he disagreed with the scientists' position.

"I strongly disagree with your contention that EFSA has not applied open and objective criteria to its assessment," Url wrote.

The IARC's opinion is only "a first step," Url wrote, and the two agencies will meet as soon as next month to determine how to regulate glyphosate (Barbara Lewis, [Reuters](#), Jan. 13). -- **SP**

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